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How to break free of stereotypes, misinformation and your fixation on the past in order to inspire innovative thinking in your company

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By Michael Gerber URL: <http://www.Entrepreneur.com/article/0,4621,317696,00.html>

If I've heard it once I've heard it 10,000 times—"I can't get my people to innovate, to create, to think outside the box."

And in case you thought I was going to disagree with you, I'm not. You're right. You can't get your people to innovate, to create, to think outside the box. So don't try. Because it will only lead to the same frustration, over and over again.

In fact, it's that very frustration—that blocked up feeling you get when you try to get your people to innovate, the way you're accustomed to doing it—which is where the opportunity lies. The opportunity for you, not your people, to break out of the box. The box you've built for yourself. The box of your expectations, your beliefs, your deeply ingrained behavior when it comes to innovation.

In short, to break through your frustrations regarding innovation, you first need to learn how to become an innovative leader.

The lack of innovation in your company—if indeed that's your problem—says more about you than it does about your people. It shows that you need to learn how to do what you want your people to do...to break free of misinformation, of stereotypes, of being fixated on the past.

Here's a simple process to help you jump-start innovation.

Step #1: Identify a recurring, operational frustration in your company. And these kinds of frustrations are easy to identify:

- Not enough cold calls are being made.
- Conversion rates from sales calls are consistently unsatisfactory.
- People resent being asked to put in extra time.
- Finding the 'right kind' of people is increasingly difficult.
- You don't have enough customers.
- Cash flow is poor.

And once you pick one, and only one, frustration, then go to step two.

Step #2: Secure a commitment from some of your people to eliminate that frustration forever. That's right. Some of your people, not all of your people. All of your people will never be able to marshal their forces to pull something like this off. No, it's some of your people you're looking for. You're putting together a team. Talk to one, talk to two. Begin the conversation about this thing that's driving you crazy. See if they're interested. If not, if they look bored, go to another person, and then another and another until you feel like you've got the requisite interest to get rid of this frustration forever. And then, know this: None of you knows how you're going to eliminate it. How is not important yet.

What is important at this step is that you're all committed to eliminating it, no matter what. Because, when you eliminate this frustration, something specific is going to happen, something that's very, very important to all of you. Which, of course, brings us to step three...

Step #3: Come to agreement about the outcome. If there's no big-bang outcome, no passion generated to energize you and your team to make what you've decided to happen, happen, it simply won't happen. Because energy is what innovation is all about. Innovation

takes energy. Lots of it. Energy is the primary current that drives passion. Passion is the energized intention that moves your initiative to its conclusion, that sees you and your people through to the result. And there needs to be a result. There needs to be something you will know happened because you can touch it, feel it, count it, see it, recognize it, know that it indeed has happened. It's got to be concrete. And it's got to be exciting. And there's got to be something else. A celebration. Which is step number four...

Step #4: Decide on a celebration. I don't know why, I really don't, but people love to celebrate things. There are parties going on at E-Myth Worldwide all the time! Birthdays, anniversaries, people leaving, people coming on board, teary farewells, joyous reunions. It drives me nuts. But our people love them. So make sure you decide on a celebration; a rollout party to commemorate your commitment to the outcome. Make it something that people really, really will look forward to with tremendous excitement and with tremendous anticipation.

I hope that I've given you a lot to think about and have helped you start innovating in your business.

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